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### **Extending our knowledge on network governance. [Review of the book *Uniting diverse organizations: Managing goal-oriented advocacy networks*, A. Saz-Carranza, 2012]**

Raab, J.

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## Extending Our Knowledge on Network Governance

**Angel Saz-Carranza. 2012. *Uniting Diverse Organizations: Managing Goal-Oriented Advocacy Networks*.**

New York/London: Routledge. 139 pp.

The prevalence and importance of interorganizational networks for the delivery of public services has considerably increased in the last few decades. As Saz-Carranza states in his book, “Although they are inherently difficult to manage, interorganizational networks are popular organizing mechanisms” (p. 8). Networks are, however, not likely to replace classic bureaucracies but rather form an additional organizational layer that has far-reaching consequences for policy development and implementation, public service delivery as well as for the management of organizations themselves.

The field of public management has responded to these changing empirical realities and we can observe an increasing stream of research on networks and collaboration in the public sector since the 1990s (see [Isett et al. 2011](#) for a recent overview and discussion of different research streams). For a considerable time, however, the discussion had revolved around the questions, if, when, and how networks might be advantageous compared to markets or hierarchies. An important further step that also served as the point of departure for Saz-Carranza’s book was the conceptual article by [Provan and Kenis \(2008\)](#) on the governance of networks. In this article, Provan and Kenis explicitly depart from the discussion about networks as a form of governance and turn to the question what different types of networks we might be able to distinguish with regard to their governance, that is, from networks as a form of governance to the governance of networks. In that endeavor, they explicitly focus on networks as consciously created and goal-directed organizational entities. It is logical that talking about management and targeted governance of networks only makes sense in cases in which the networks are consciously created and in which goals exist at the network level. In their article, [Provan and Kenis \(2008\)](#) suggest three ideal types of network governance (they call them modes): the participant-governed, the lead organization-governed network, and the network administrative organization. In the latter case, a separate, neutral organization with several staff members or an individual person is installed to coordinate and monitor network activity, whereas in the other cases, all network members jointly govern the network or one of the organizations takes the lead. [Provan and Kenis \(2008\)](#) also introduced the idea that network governance is inherently characterized by fundamental tensions that cannot be resolved but only managed. They identify three tensions in this context: between efficiency and inclusiveness, between internal and external legitimacy, and between stability and flexibility. The study by Saz-Carranza builds on this research and combines it with insights from the research program on network management by Agranoff and McGuire. The book is an extended version of an article published by Saz-Carranza together with his PhD supervisor Sonia Ospina in *JPART* in 2011 ([Saz-Carranza and Ospina 2011](#)). Both are based on the author’s dissertation in 2008.

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## SUMMARY OF BOOK AND RESULTS

The study presented in *Uniting Diverse Organizations: Managing Goal-Oriented Advocacy Networks* explicitly and exclusively focuses on networks with a network administrative organization (NAO). It examines four NAO-governed networks within the immigration policy domain in the United States from 2002 to 2006, “looking at how the NAO, a key actor, generates the conditions for joint action, despite lacking hierarchical authority over the network members” (p. 9). However, Saz-Carranza does not focus on the three tensions suggested by Provan and Kenis (2008) but introduces a fourth one, the tension between diversity and unity. Saz-Carranza argues that given the nature of goal-directed whole networks, this is the most crucial tension, which has to be managed. It is in these networks that organizations of different size, reputation, organization cultures, and goals come together to jointly achieve an outcome. Diversity, therefore, has on the one hand to be overcome in order to achieve network level goals but on the other hand has to be preserved, since the network is only sustainable, if the organizations continue to keep their individual characteristics. In this line of reasoning, networks will only be effective, if diversity can be positively used in generating resources and ideas for the achievement of network goals and the solution of joint problems. The tension between diversity and unity is of course not new and has been around in sociological thinking for over a century and figured prominently in the contingency theory in organization theory in the 1960s as the tension between differentiation and integration (which the author briefly acknowledges). The main contribution of the book is therefore not so much the conceptualization of the tension but how to manage it in public sector networks. However, the author could have linked the discussion on the diversity-unity tension more to the general discussion on differentiation and integration in various fields, which I will discuss in more detail in my critique below.

The book gives a very brief introduction to the discussion on network governance and network management and positions the study within this body of literature. Chapter 2 presents an in-depth description of the networks (within case analysis) after a brief introduction to the US immigration policy domain. Network boundaries were based on membership lists. Data collection took place in two waves and consisted of individual, group, and phone interviews with a total of 31 interviews and included managers, NAO staff, and organizational members. All selected networks, that is, the executive director of the NAO were recognized in a National Leadership award program. Organizations or networks selected for the leadership award and therefore regarded by Saz-Carranza as “successful” cases had to show “that their leaders were tackling critical social problems with effective and systemic solutions, enacting leadership that is strategic, bringing different groups of people together, and sustaining results beyond any individual effort” (p. 30). In addition, they had to present documentation of results. A 50:1 nominee to awardee ratio according to Saz-Carranza signals a rigorous selection procedure and therefore can be seen as an indicator for the networks’ high performance (p. 30). The author acknowledges the selection bias that comes with the selection of cases out of this award program and the subsequent low variability. As a consequence, he focuses on “producing initial theory, using an interpretative logic, and cross-case comparisons along dimensions other than success” instead of making causal inferences about success factors (p. 109).

Most of the organizations within the networks are nonprofit organizations whose mission is to promote immigrants' rights. All networks carry out activities in three programmatic areas: community, civic, and technical education for immigrants; advocacy in favor of immigrants' rights; and leadership development and organizing member organizations (p. 13). The most important achievements for all four networks (with various degrees of success) was the organization of mass rallies for immigration reform and immigrant rights that drew up to 500,000 people and achieved national media coverage. In addition, the networks managed to influence public opinion in their states and contribute to defeating anti-immigration policies.

Chapters 3–6 present an extensive cross-case analysis and theoretical discussion of the study's findings. The book ends with a summary conclusion of the findings and presents an extended appendix about the research design and methodology of the study. The author finds that “the successful networks studied here are simultaneously both united and diverse. The way these networks manage to avoid diversity undermining unity is by generating unity around three topics: A meta-goal, identity and the value of diversity” (p. 95). This means the management strategy has to focus very much on the cognitive aspects within the processes. Saz-Carranza identifies four activities by the NAO to manage the network's paradoxical tensions: Activation (attracting and selecting members), facilitation (supporting member involvement, facilitating decision making), framing (common meaning making), and capacitating (help to increase the member's and the network's organizational capacities). Although these management activities relatively closely resemble the ones generally suggested by Agranoff and McGuire for public sector networks, especially activation and capacitating seem to be strongly influenced by the specific empirical context, US nonprofit networks in a controversial policy field. The author himself therefore limits the findings to networks with nonprofits and thus acknowledges this limitation. Even though the book does not go much beyond the 2011 *JPART* article (Saz-Carranza and Ospina 2001) with regard to the core findings of the study, I very much recommend it to students and scholars who would like to know more about but especially intend to study the management of networks. The book is very readable and does not resemble a “typical” dissertation manuscript that can sometimes be a bit lengthy. Instead, it is a very compact presentation of the study and its results with a short take away section for practitioners. The added value compared to the article is the in-depth description of the cases and detailed description of the research design and methodology (which we rarely read in journal articles these days, because of restricted space). The research design and methodology appendix might serve as a blueprint for similar studies in this area, which we need to make further progress in our understanding of the management of networks. I agree with the author that there is still a long way to go with respect to the management of networks rather than the management in networks (p. 95). I also agree with the future research themes noted in the discussion that need to be tackled, for example, individual competencies of people and organizations in the functioning of networks and a greater emphasis on time and processes.

My points of critique revolve around three issues. First, as discussed above, the diversity-unity tension is basically a variation on the more general tension of differentiation and integration that all social systems face. Even though Saz-Carranza acknowledges the conceptual similarity, the book lacks a theoretical discussion that could have

situated his arguments on the unity-diversity tension in public sector networks to the overarching differentiation-integration tension in sociology and organization theory. Second, tensions and their management are not new in the organizational theory literature. Saz-Carranza would have done well to discuss what is generally known about coping with organizational tensions. Third, the diversity concept as used in the book could be more refined. In the literature on teams for example, the question of how the diversity of teams affects their performance has been center stage for at least a decade. Because results of empirical research about the relationship between the two variables have been mixed, [Harrison and Klein \(2007\)](#) suggested that scholars have to distinguish different concepts within diversity, namely variety, separation, and disparity. Depending on the specific concept, the effect of diversity on performance is different as meanwhile also shown empirically. Although variety, for example different (disciplinary) backgrounds, is likely to have a positive effect on performance, separation (opposing worldviews) might not. Disparity (different reputations) might yet have a different effect. The diversity concepts used in the book, that is, the variability of network members with regard to organizational demographics and cultures, reputation, budgets, size, goals, etc., are lumped together in one unifying concept. If the claims within the team literature about the multidimensionality of the diversity concept are correct, I am wondering, to what extent managing diversity and unity with regard to different organizational competences (variety) works in the same way as balancing different organizational cultures (separation) or differences in size or reputation (disparity)? For example, to what extent does an NAO have to apply the same management activities when trying to manage size and resource differences compared to diversity with regard to policy goals or competencies of member organizations?

Including these issues, however, would have definitely made the book longer, more complex, and less accessible for practitioners. Since not only the management of networks but also publishing research involves the management of tensions, I regard these points not as a disqualification of the book but rather as important challenges for further investigation.

**Jörg Raab**

*Tilburg University*

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